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IN-DEPTH STUDY OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SUBSIDIARY STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION

(Item 10 of the provisional agenda)

Report by the Executive Secretary

A. Background

1. The Commission, at its forty-sixth session, considered the report of the Executive Secretary, in response to its resolution 262 (XLIII) of 30 April 1987, which provided an assessment of the effectiveness of the conference structure. It observed that the restructured committees effected by that resolution had not functioned sufficiently effectively as the principal subsidiary organs of the Commission, and that their technical and legislative competence appeared to have diminished.

2. The Commission noted that the subject of the subsidiary structure and enhancing its efficient functioning involved a wide range of issues and evoked divergent views by its members. Therefore, it endorsed the proposal of the Executive Secretary to conduct, with the advice of a group of eminent persons, an in-depth study on the intergovernmental subsidiary structure of the Commission and submit its proposals to the Commission at its forty-seventh session. The terms of reference of the in-depth study are presented in annex I to this document.

3. The Commission suggested that the Group of Eminent Persons, besides recommending a subsidiary structure, should provide a sharper vision of the role of the Commission in facing development challenges in the coming decades. It also suggested that the group should review the relevant aspects of the proposed ESCAP council for regional economic co-operation in the context of the conference structure.

4. The Group of Eminent Persons was constituted with 14 high-level experts selected from different parts of the region well known for their extensive knowledge of and experience in development issues and their familiarity with the functioning of the United Nations system. The Group held its first meeting in August 1990. After intensive discussion during the meeting and close interaction among the members through correspondence in the intervening period, it met again in December 1990 and adopted its report. The report containing its recommendations can be found in document E/ESCAP/798 presented to the Commission.

5. The Group of Eminent Persons addressed the three tasks assigned to it by the Commission in some depth. Their scholarship, innovative thinking, seriousness of purpose and their vision of the future of the organization have been reflected clearly in the report. The report provides an objective framework for the Commission to consider and to take a decision on the matter.

6. The recommendations of the Group with regard to the thematic approach and the restructuring of the subsidiary structure have been studied carefully by the secretariat. The consequent reorientation of the programme of work that would be required has been examined in great detail. Consultations have been held with ACPR on the implications of the thematic approach for the functioning of the Commission and the secretariat and for the revised intergovernmental structure. On the basis of these examinations and consultations, the Executive Secretary has come to the conclusion that the recommendations by the Group of Eminent Persons could provide a viable and effective alternative to the present structure holding promise for further enhancement in the efficiency of the work of the Commission.

7. The thematic approach to the work of the Commission would appear to have great potential for its programme of work, although there could be some difficulties in implementing such an approach, especially since Governments are generally organized on a sectoral basis. The Commission might wish to recall that since 1981, it had deliberated on a specific theme at each of its annual sessions. There was intense debate on the theme and an in-depth examination of the wide-ranging issues pertaining to it which helped to focus the attention of members and associate members on the particular problem area. Decisions arrived at by the Commission were followed by interdivisional task forces and multidisciplinary missions to countries, with a view to developing intersectoral studies and action programmes. As a result of such efforts, there have been several intersectoral studies and projects, although the greater part of the secretariat's work has remained largely sectoral. Often these led to adoption of specific programmes for members and associate members, in the implementation of which ESCAP and other relevant United Nations agencies collaborated in joint inter-agency activities.

8. The thematic approach suggested by the Group would reinforce the practice established by the Commission and take it one step further. It envisages a gradual and progressive shift towards organizing the work of the Commission on the basis of topical and emerging themes of importance to members and associate members so as to enhance its relevance to their needs and problems and increase its effectiveness in serving them. The approach is intellectually stimulating and is in keeping with the Commission's professed intersectoral orientation towards development. It would further the study of development problems in a wider perspective rather than treating them as disparate segments without appreciation of the interplay

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among them These comprehensive studies would assist in the development of action programmes which would be integrated at the conceptual, planning and implementation phases to address a problem in its entirety. Such programmes, with appropriate adaptations to suit local conditions, could assist Governments in implementing their development policies and programmes.

9. The General Assembly, in its resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977, conferred on the regional commissions the role of the main economic and social development centres for their respective regions. It mandated the regional commissions to exercise team leadership and assume responsibility for co-ordination and co-operation within the United Nations system at the regional level. ESCAP has had experience in fulfilling those mandates as exemplified by the establishment of the Interagency Committee for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific and the Steering Committee for Implementation of the Transport and Communications Decade and by taking several other similar initiatives. It has evolved mechanisms for consultations with the specialized agencies and other relevant bodies for harmonizing biennial programmes of work. Adoption of the thematic approach to its work would enhance the role of ESCAP in fulfilling the mandate for co-ordination within the United Nations system at the regional level and thus help further in avoiding duplication or overlapping in the programme of work of the system. Furthermore, that would help to maximize the comparative advantage that ESCAP enjoys by virtue of its multidisciplinary strength.

10. Given the growing understanding of the complexity of the development process and the interdependence of activities in the different sectors to attain the goal of balanced development, several Governments have set up interministerial or interdepartmental groups on particular subjects to serve as nodal points for those subjects. Such a trend in member and associate member Governments is encouraging and would facilitate a multidisciplinary thematic approach towards development.

B. Proposal

11. It is, therefore, proposed that the Commission consider and endorse the revised intergovernmental structure subsidiary to the Commission as recommended by the Group of Eminent Persons. The proposed revised structure, based on a blend of the thematic and sectoral approaches, would comprise: a standing committee for regional economic co-operation; two thematic committees, one for the theme on the environment and sustainable

development and the other for the theme on poverty alleviation and economic growth; five technical committees, one each on (i) energy development and natural resources, (ii) population, human resources and social development, (iii) statistics, (iv) trade, industry and technology, and (v) transport and communications; and two special bodies, one for the least developed and land-locked developing countries and the other for the Pacific island developing countries. All the committees and the two special bodies would report directly to the Commission. A chart on the proposed structure is presented in annex II to this report. The terms of reference of the standing committee for regional economic co-operation is provided in annex III. A listing of the tasks for each of the thematic and technical committees is provided in annex IV.

12. In making the proposal, the Executive Secretary wishes to draw the attention of the Commission to the following points.

1. Standing committee for regional economic co-operation

13. The Group of Eminent Persons felt that regional co-operation was the very raison d'être of the Commission and so regional economic co-operation should be the pre-eminent theme for its work. The Group, therefore, recommended a high-level advocacy mechanism to mobilize ideas and promote initiatives in that direction. The standing committee for regional economic co-operation would be concerned primarily with providing the much-needed impetus for greater economic co-operation among the countries of the Asian and Pacific region, particularly in the areas of trade, investment flows, and technology development and transfer. Although many of the region's developing countries had successfully met a variety of challenges in the 1980s, the Asian and Pacific region needed a more concerted impulse in order to sustain and broaden the impact of growth in the 1990s, particularly so since regionalism was becoming a potent stimulus to growth in the world economy. Strengthened regional economic co-operation could serve as a powerful catalyst for national efforts to hasten the restructuring of the region's developing economies as well as to provide the means of strengthening them and of furthering the region's growing interdependence. A pattern of regional complementarity had already begun to emerge among the more dynamic Asian economies, with the economic strength of Japan playing a central role.

14. The standing committee for regional economic co-operation, as an integral part of the intergovernmental structure subsidiary to the Commission

and reporting to it, would enhance the Commission's capacity effectively to promote and accelerate the process of regional economic co-operation and thus provide better and mutually beneficial opportunities for the countries of the region to achieve their goal of economic and social development. It would not duplicate or compete with any of the existing or proposed mechanisms for regional and subregional co-operation.

15. The task of promoting and strengthening regional co-operation should devolve essentially on the countries of the region. It is their responsibility to devise appropriate mechanisms to facilitate the process. The terms of reference of the Commission, as approved by the Economic and Social Council, have defined the geographical scope of the region that the Commission is to serve. Non-regional members of the Commission play an important role as partners in the development process in the Asian and Pacific region. Their inputs to regional economic co-operation would be forthcoming in the forum of the Commission. In addition, they should be invited, as appropriate, by the standing committee to attend its sessions as well as those of its sub-committees and task forces. In order to enlist their co-operation, international and intergovernmental development and financial institutions, the non-governmental organizations and the private sector in the region should be invited to attend the sessions of the standing committee and to participate in its task forces or sub-committees, as appropriate.

16. As the Group of Eminent Persons proposed, the standing committee should be a representative body reflecting the diversity obtaining in the Asian and Pacific region and the aspirations of its peoples. Its members should be elected by the Commission according to the rules of procedure of the Commission from among the countries of the region on the basis of subregional constituencies. Members of the respective constituencies should meet informally among themselves and convey their respective nominations to the Commission prior to the conduct of the election by the Commission. This practice is often followed by the General Assembly, where members are elected upon nomination by regional groups. The two additional members of the region from among the general membership of the Commission should be elected by the Commission without seeking any nomination from the subregional constituencies. The duration of membership on the standing committee, as proposed by the Group of Eminent Persons, would be two years. There should be no permanent members on the standing committee. However, in order to

derive benefit from the experience of incumbent members, there should be provision for re-election of serving members. Representation on the standing committee should be at the ministerial or sub-ministerial level.

2. Cross-referral among the committees and bodies

17. It has been proposed that the standing committee, thematic committees, technical committees, and the special bodies report directly to the Commission. However, there could be issues on the agenda of the technical committees which would warrant consideration by the thematic committees and the special bodies and vice versa. Therefore, besides reporting to the Commission on the overall work of the committees and bodies, there should be provision for cross-reference, on an optional basis, among the committees and bodies of specific issues before reporting on those issues to the Commission.

3. Special bodies

18. Two special bodies are proposed, one for the least developed and land-locked developing countries and the other for the Pacific island developing countries. These are proposed with a view to enabling the entire membership of the Commission to ensure that the special needs and problems of these countries are met adequately and appropriately in the programme of work of the Commission. These bodies would also ensure that the mandates of the General Assembly and other global bodies, especially those of the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Paris in September 1990, are fulfilled.

4. Duration and periodicity

19. Except for the standing committee, which should meet at least once a year, the committees and the special bodies should meet once every two years. The standing committee should have flexibility in formulating its agenda, as well as in organizing its work and deciding on the duration of its meetings. The thematic and technical committees should meet at each session for a period of seven working days. There should not be more than five meetings each year of the thematic and technical committees and of the special bodies.

5. Resources for participating in the meetings of the subsidiary structure

20. The Commission may wish to note that financial provisions from the regular budget of the United Nations do exist to facilitate the participation

of members in the meetings of the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies. There is no such provision for the participation of members and associate members in the meetings of the Commission or of its subsidiary bodies. It was only recently that the Pacific Trust Fund was established by voluntary contributions of a few member countries of the Commission to assist the Pacific island countries in participating in the annual sessions of the Commission. However, that is neither an adequate nor a permanent solution of the problems faced by many other members and associate members in participating in and contributing to the deliberations of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies. The Commission may wish to consider recommending to the General Assembly the extension of such support to ESCAP to enable it to provide assistance, especially to the least developed, land-locked developing and Pacific island developing countries, in order to ensure their participation in the sessions of the Commission.

6. Servicing of the subsidiary structure

21. In view of the sectoral organization of the subsidiary structure as well as of the secretariat, each legislative committee has been serviced by the appropriate substantive division of the secretariat. Adoption of the thematic approach and the proposed subsidiary structure would involve the servicing of the different committees on a collective basis by the secretariat rather than by individual divisions as at present. Appropriate reorganization would be undertaken in due course in consultation with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

22. The Commission may recall that its resources from the regular budget of the United Nations have been inadequate when compared with those of other regional commissions and have remained static for over a decade. The resource position was aggravated by the economy measures resulting from General Assembly resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986 and Commission resolution 262 (XLIII) of 30 April 1987. The Group of Eminent Persons, taking note of this position, urged the Executive Secretary to request the Commission to give serious consideration to the subject of augmentation of regular budget resources in order to strengthen the capability of the secretariat to cope with the reoriented and expanded programme of work, and to make appropriate and strong recommendations to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. The Commission is requested to consider the matter and make an appropriate recommendation to resolve the prevailing imbalance.

23. The Commission may recall that extrabudgetary resources provided by international agencies and donor countries have played a very important role in enabling ESCAP to provide services to members and associate members. In that connection, the Commission may wish to endorse strongly the hope expressed by the Group of Eminent Persons that generous donors would consider providing greater and sustained financial support to ESCAP as it expands its activities in a selected and a well-focused programme of work.

7. Other recommendations made by the Group of Eminent Persons

24. In addition to the intergovernmental structure subsidiary to the Commission, the Group of Eminent Persons considered other issues in order to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of ESCAP and made appropriate recommendations.

(a) Strengthening research capability

25. The Group recommended that the research capability of ESCAP should be strengthened in order to enable it to study policy-induced changes which had led to significant progress in the development process and to help its members evolve comprehensive policies based on objective experience. The Group also recommended that in view of the extensive and rapid changes taking place in the global economy and particularly in the region, an advisory group on development policy should be formed comprising senior government officials, academicians and entrepreneurs, serving in their personal capacity, and convened annually by the Executive Secretary.

26. The advisory board on development policy would serve as a "think tank" and enrich the intellectual base of ESCAP, strengthen its research capability, and enable it to exercise its mandated role of team leadership within the United Nations system in the region. The Commission may wish to endorse this.

(b) ESCAP journal

27. The Group recommended that ESCAP should publish a monthly or bimonthly, comprehensive journal of high calibre and distribute it widely. It noted that some divisions of the secretariat bring out periodicals or publications of high quality. Because of their sectoral nature, the multidisciplinary character of the work of the Commission is not reflected adequately.

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28. The Commission might wish to consider approving the publication of an ESCAP journal, scholarly in nature and multidisciplinary in coverage, which should be distributed widely in order to increase ESCAP visibility and project its image as the main general economic and social development centre in the Asian and Pacific region. The journal would include reports on studies and expert groups, case studies of successful projects, position papers and state-of-the-art reviews on social and economic development issues of concern to the Asian and Pacific region.

(c) Execution of country projects

29. The Group felt that in order to ensure the usefulness of regional projects, there was a need for a mechanism to link them more closely with country projects. It was only when a regional project was dovetailed to country programmes that it would become useful and the findings of the project put into operation in that country programme. In this context, the Commission may wish to note that the General Assembly, in resolution 32/197, accorded a mandate to the regional commissions, inter alia, to function as executing agencies for intersectoral, subregional, regional and interregional projects. Thus, the mandate for regional commissions to implement intersectoral projects does exist. In the light of the recommendations of the Group of Eminent Persons, the Commission may wish to reiterate that mandate.

C. Conclusion

30. In conclusion, it needs to be stressed that the intergovernmental structure subsidiary to the Commission would be as effective as the interest evinced in it by members and associate members and their active and committed participation in the forums of the structure. Government representatives to the committees and bodies should, therefore, be at a senior level, knowledgeable in the subject and involved in formulating policies, plans and programmes of the Government. Such representation would stimulate spontaneous and meaningful discussion in the committees, lead to effective and useful conclusions and decisions for the consideration of the Commission, and hold promise for follow-up action in the countries on the decisions of the Commission. Should the Commission wish to accord its approval to the proposals submitted in this document, it might also consider

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requesting its members and associate members to ensure proper and adequate representation on its subsidiary bodies in order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of its subsidiary structure.

31. If the Commission decides to endorse the proposal for the revised intergovernmental structure subsidiary to the Commission, it may wish to present its endorsement in the form of a resolution, in conformity with past practice.

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ANNEXES

Annex I

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE STUDY ON THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SUBSIDIARY STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION

1. The following are the terms of reference envisaged for the study:

2. Bearing in mind the relevant resolutions which were adopted by the Commission and the various stages in its evolution, to review and undertake a comprehensive and fundamental study of the role of the intergovernmental structure subsidiary to the Commission, and to recommend a more effective structure referring, inter alia, to the following aspects:

(a) Changing needs of the member countries in the light of emerging economic and social developments in the region;

(b) Changing scope of regional co-operation;

(c) Changing role of the Commission;

(d) Interdisciplinary character of the development issues and unique capacity of the Commission;

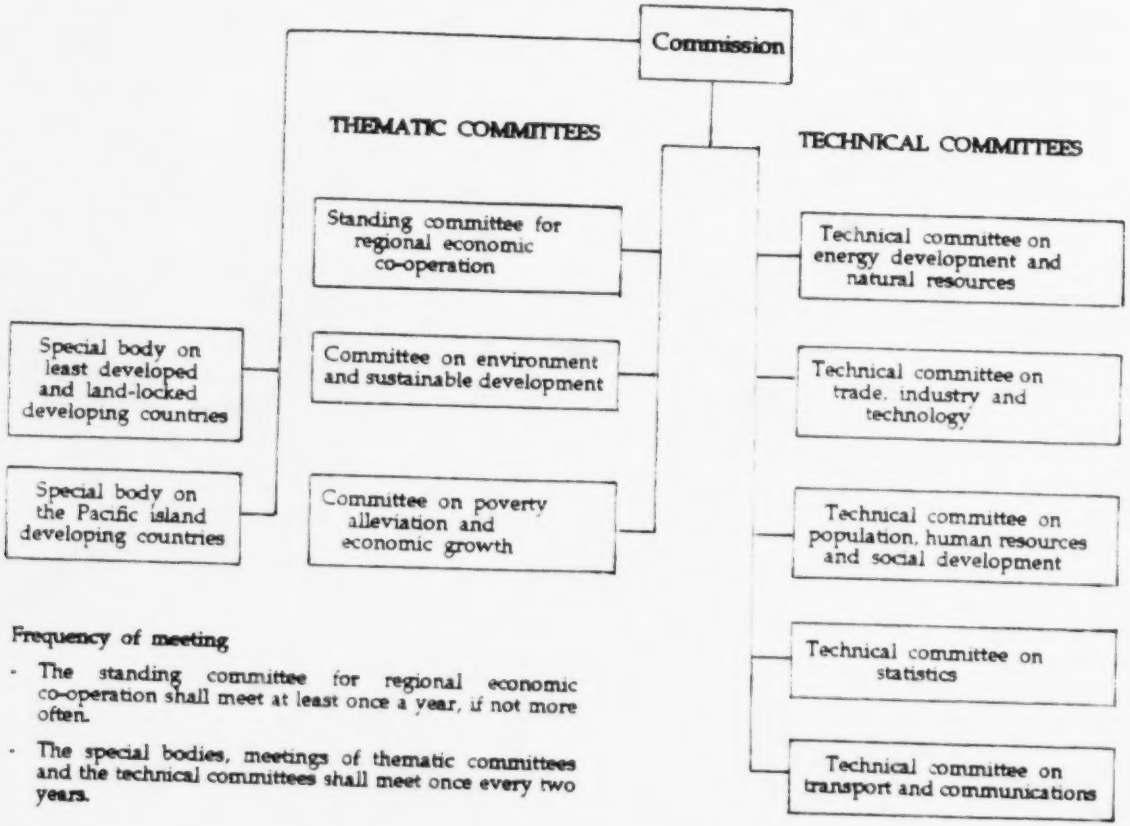
(e) Increased capability of the Commission in technical assistance activities;

(f) Maximization of resource efficiency.

3. To finalize the study and submit a report to the Executive Secretary by 20 December 1990 to enable him to incorporate, as appropriate, its recommendations in his report on the subject to the Commission at its forty-seventh session.

Annex II

PROPOSED STRUCTURE


Commission
THEMATIC COMMITTEES
TECHNICAL COMMITTEES
Standing committee for regional economic co-operation
Special body on least developed and land-locked developing countries
Committee on environment and sustainable development
Special body on the Pacific island developing countries
Committee on poverty alleviation and economic growth
Technical committee on energy development and natural resources
Technical committee on trade, industry and technology
Technical committee on population, human resources and social development
Technical committee on statistics
Technical committee on transport and communications

Frequency of meeting

- The standing committee for regional economic co-operation shall meet at least once a year, if not more often.
- The special bodies, meetings of thematic committees and the technical committees shall meet once every two years.

Ministerial conferences

Ministerial conferences should be organized on an ad hoc basis on specific issues concerning areas such as the environment, industry and technology, international trade, population, poverty alleviation, social development, women in development, and urbanization.

Advisory bodies

- Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission should be convened monthly by the Executive Secretary;
- Advisory board on development policies composed of representatives of Governments, academia and the private sector should be convened annually by the Executive Secretary.

Annex III

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE FOR REGIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION

The standing committee for regional economic co-operation, under the overall direction of the Commission, shall serve to mobilize ideas on and facilitate regional economic co-operation. It shall:

(a) Review periodically:

(i) The impact of global economic developments in areas such as trade, investment flows, and industrial and technological development on the economies of the ESCAP region;

(ii) The future economic outlook of the region and structural adjustments needed to strengthen the economies of the region;

(iii) The macro-economic situation of and policy options for the region;

(iv) Measures for strengthening regional economic co-operation in sustainable economic development.

(b) Undertake policy-oriented studies, formulate models for action, arrange for dialogue among member countries and subregional organizations, and disseminate results on issues relating to regional economic co-operation.

(c) Organize consultations with development agencies within and outside the region, international monetary and technical institutions, the private sector and donor countries as and when required.

(d) Undertake such other tasks as the Commission may direct from time to time.

Annex IV

TASKS OF THE THEMATIC AND TECHNICAL COMMITTEES

Thematic committees

(a) Standing committee for regional economic co-operation

See terms of reference provided in annex III.

(b) Environment and sustainable development

(i) Pollution control and alleviation

(ii) Sustainable ecosystem and management

(c) Poverty alleviation and economic growth

(i) Socio-economic aspects of agriculture

(ii) Integrated rural development

(iii) Urbanization

(iv) Employment opportunities

(v) Targeted programmes for extending the benefits of growth to all sections of people

Technical committees

(d) Energy and natural resources

(i) Development and conservation of energy

(ii) Water resources

(iii) Mineral resources

(iv) Remote sensing

(e) Trade, industry and technology

(i) Trade expansion

(ii) Industry and technology

(iii) Industrial restructuring

(iv) Role of public and private sectors

(v) Liberalization and deregulation

(vi) Transnational corporations

(vii) Tourism

(f) Population, human resources and social development

(i) Population planning

(ii) Human resources development

(iii) Social investment

(iv) Women in development

(v) Empowerment of people in decision-making

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(g) Statistics

(i) Collection, compilation, analysis and interpretation of statistics

(ii) National accounts

(h) Transport and communications

(i) Multimodal transport

(ii) Land transport, including railways

(iii) Shipping, ports and inland waterways

(iv) Telecommunications

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